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THE FIGHTER

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE
Author of "Caleb Conover, Railroadman," "Dr. Dale," "On Glory's Trail," etc.
NEW YORK
FRANK F. LOVELL COMPANY
1909

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(Continued.)

Desiree did not answer. She was asleep. On tip-toe, Caleb crossed to the bed. He laid her down upon it, smoothing the not tumbled pillows with his unaccustomed hand. Then he tiptoed with ponderous softness out of the room and closed the door silently behind him.

"Well!" he exclaimed gleefully, addressing Jack and the doctor who were consulting at the far end of the next room. "Guess I had my fright for nothing! She'll get on fine! She's sound asleep, an' her forehead's—"

"It is the morphia I gave her to deaden the pain," said the doctor. "She had not been suffering so terribly it would have taken effect before."

"Morphia?" Sufferin'!" repeated Caleb. "Why, she's hardly sufferin' at all. Told me so, herself. Look here!" he went on, bullishly, as he advanced on the physician. "I've mean to say there's a chance she won't get well!"

"There is no earthly power," retorted the doctor, nettled at the domineering tone, "that can keep her alive ten hours longer."

"You lie! Don't I know?"

"I cannot thrash you in the ante-room of death," answered the doctor, "and I take your sorrow into consideration. But what I do said is true. Miss Shevlin has sustained internal injuries which cannot but prove fatal. Nothing but her yearning to see you again has kept her alive as long as this. It is best to be frank."

Caleb was eyeing him stupidly. At last he turned to Jack.

"Did you send those tel'grams?" he asked and his voice was dead.

"Yes, sir," replied Hawarden. "I sent them, but—"

"But I told him it was useless," put in the doctor. "There is not a fighting chance. She will not live. The morphia stupor. The moisture on her forehead is what you laymen would call the 'death-sweat.' She—"

"You lie!" broke forth beside himself. "You may fool women and children by your damn professional airs but it don't go down with me. I've seen folks die. An' they ain't an' cheerful an' bright like Dey Shevlin was just now. You quacks make a livin' by throwin' medicines you don't understand into systems you don't understand at all. I tell you, a triflin' case of mumps or headache you look all-fired wise an' write o' prescriptions in a furrin language to him who's just when a doctor's thing's really the matter you're as helpless as a drunken longshoreman. If the patient dies from your blunders an' from the dope you throw hazard into him, he hasn't a chance from the start. If he gets well in spite of you, it's your mighty skill that pulled him through. When a fellow gets colic an' you give him a couple of pills, what do you do? You don't rest till you get a chance to stick your knives into him. If he gets well, it's a 'miraculous' or 'modern' surgery. If he croaks, the 'operation' was a success. Only the patient got peevish an' died. There never yet was an appendicitis case where the quack in charge didn't say there'd been no hope if the operation had been delayed another two hours. Oh, you're a fine lot of fakers an' gold brick men, you doctors! An' now you say my little girl's dyin'! God damn your soul, I tell you again you lie!"

The doctor picked up his black bag without replying and moved toward the outer door.

"Where you goin'?" demanded Caleb. "I'm going home," was the stiff retort. "I drop this case. I'll not be associated longer with a wild beast like—"

The words were choked in his mouth. At a spring, Conover had cleared the space between them, and the physician, by the throat and was shaking him back and forth with jerks that threatened to snap the victim's spine. Then he hurled him to the center of the room and towered over him ablaze with fury.

"Yes, I'm a wild beast, all right!" he snarled. "An' I'm lib' to become a homicidal one at that. Drop the case, would you? Sneak out an' leave that poor kid in there to lose what chance she might have from your help? Well, Mr. doctor, if you take the step out into that hall, the next step you take'll be in hell. What's more, you'll go back to that sick room, right now; an' you'll work over here. If I catch you neglectin' her or tryin' to get away,—by the Eternal, I'll tear you in half with my bare hands. Now go! Go! Go!"

The doctor, his rage tempered by the memory of the iron fingers on his windpipe, glared at the madman in angry irresolution. Caleb's muscles tightened ominously. The physician recoiled a step in most unprofessional haste.

"You are a dangerous maniac!" he said somewhat unsteadily, "and you shall go to prison for this outrageous assault. For the present, I shall remain on the case. Not because of your threats, but from common humanity toward—"

"Toward yourself," finished Caleb satisfied that he had won his point. "An' just to make sure I'll lock the outer door of this suite an' pocket the key. Now go back to your patient!"

Outside, there was glaring, heartless sunshine. In the sick room stood Caleb and Jack, one on either side of the bed over which the doctor was bending. With closed eyes, Desiree Shevlin rested where Conover had laid her. For hours she had lain thus.

"I can do no more," pronounced the doctor rising and meeting Caleb's glazed eyes. "The end may come now at any moment."

"If only there were someone to pray!" muttered Jack, battling to keep back the tears. "I wish Mr. Grant was here."

"Pray?" echoed Caleb, rousing himself and clutching at the faint hope. "It can't do any harm. Pray, man! Pray!"

"I can't!" babbled the boy. "I don't know how. I never prayed in my life."

"Try it!" groaned Caleb. "Try it, I say! You may have beginner's luck!"

"No use!" interposed the doctor. "It's over."

As he spoke, Desiree stirred ever so slightly. Her closed eyes opened. She seemed to settle lower in the bed. Then she lay very still.

With a sobbing cry Jack Hawarden rushed from the room. Conover stood dumb, petrified, staring wildly down into the unseeing, all seeing eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Last Fight.

Under the concentrated anguish of Conover's gaze the girl's long lashes seemed to flicker ever so slightly. Through the Gethsemane of the moment the impossible fancy that she lived pierced Caleb's numb brain, tearing away the apathy that was closing over him. All at once he was again the Fighter—the man who could not know defeat.

"She is alive!" he persisted as the

physician turned from the bed. "Look! She—"

Dr. Bond's bearded lip curled in a sad derision that woke Caleb's smoldering antagonism into flame. With a sudden insane impulse the Fighter knelt on the edge of the bed and caught up the pitifully still little hands.

"Dey!" he cried, his great rough voice echoing through the dreadful hush of the room.

Bond opened his mouth to protest; then shrank back to the wall, staring in heavy wonder.

"Dey!" called the Fighter again, an appeal of command in his tone. "Dey! Come back!"

It was not the fall of a weak nature vainly summoning the Lost to return. Rather it was the sharp, fierce call of the officer who by sheer force of accepted rulership rallies his stricken men. Sublimely imperious, backed by a will of chilled steel and by a mentality that had never been successfully balked, the Fighter's voice resounded again and again in that harsh, domineering order.

"Dey! Come back!"

Calling upon his seemingly dead love to re-enter the frail flesh she was even now quitting, Conover threw into his appeal the last strength that was his and the immeasurably enforced power of his despair and adoration. He held the white hands gripped tight to his chest as he faced close to the silent girl's; his light eyes blazing into hers; his every faculty bent with superhuman pressure upon drawing an answering sign from the lifeless form.

"It is madness!" muttered the doctor; infected nevertheless by the dominant magnetism that played about the Fighter and that vibrated through every tone of his imperative voice. "It is madness. She is dead, or—"

Conover did not heed nor hear. He had no consciousness for anything save the supreme battle of his whole life. Vaguely he knew that the innate mastery within him which for years had subdued strong men to his will had been his nothing to the nameless power that love was now enabling him to put forth.

From the threshold of death,—yes, from the grave itself,—she should come at his call; this little, silent wisp of humanity that meant life and heaven to him.

The red haired man was fighting. But the fiercest of his campaigns had hitherto been as child's play by comparison with this contest with the Unknown. Once again he was taking the Kingdom of Heaven by violence! This time literally.

The mad whim had possessed him through no conscious volition of his own; and he had acted upon it without reflection. He was matching his mortal power against the Infinite.

He was doing what Science knew could not be done; what the most hysterical spiritualist had never claimed power to achieve. He was trying, by force of personality and sheer desire, to cheer the flight of a soul upon the threshold.

And over and over again his voice swelled, untiring, through the room, in that one compelling demand—a demand that held no compromise, no compromise of ought else save utter, fierce domination.

"Dey! Come back!"

The doctor, irresolute, slipped from the room. This type of mania was outside his experience. In time it would wear itself out. In the meanwhile, his nerves could not endure the sound of that ceaseless calling; the sight of the tense, furiously masterful face.

It was two hours later that Dr. Colfax, the first of the summoned New York specialists, arrived. Jack Hawarden met him at the entrance of the hotel and explained the case.

"I wish," the boy added, "you would go in and see what you can do for Mr. Conover. I'm afraid he has lost his mind and is in the room several times and—"

He shuddered at the picture conjured up. His nerves had gone to pieces. "An' he's terrible," he went on. "I didn't dare interrupt him. He was crouching there, holding her close to him and looking at her as if he'd drag her spirit by main force back into her body. And the time he was saying over and over—"

"I will go up," said the specialist, cutting in on the narrative. "Even if the local physician did not complete a full examination to make sure she was dead, such insane treatment would destroy any chance of life. Show me the way."

Together they entered the sick-room. Conover had not stirred. Through the closed door they had heard the hoarse rumble of his eternal command:—"Dey! Come back!"

Dr. Colfax walked briskly across to the bed.

"Here!" he said, addressing Caleb in the abrupt tone used for ordering a delirious. "This won't do! You must—"

He paused; his first idle glance at Desiree's pale face changing in a flash to one of keen professional interest. He caught one of her wrists, at the point where it was engulged in Caleb's great hand; held it for an instant; then, turning, flung open his black medical case.

Jack, who had lingered at the door, hurried forward on tiptoe. He whispered quaveringly:

"The local physician was mistaken," returned Dr. Colfax in the same key. "Or he—"

"I have heard of such cases," he murmured, in wonder. "But I only know of two that are authentic. It is more probable that she was merely in a collapse. I can inquire later."

While he talked, he had been selecting and filling a hypodermic needle. Now, stepping past Conover, who had not noted the newcomers' presence, he pressed the needle-point into Desiree's forearm.

"You really think then?" cried Jack. "I think it is worth a fight, snapped the doctor, looking down and see if my nurse has come. I left her at the station. She could not walk as fast as I. Go out quietly. This man doesn't even know we are here, but I don't want to take any chance just yet of breaking his influence. Time enough for that when the digitals begin to act."

Caleb Conover stretched himself and sat up. He felt oddly weak and depressed. For the first time in his life he was tired out.

For twenty hours he had slept. The afternoon sun was pouring in at the windows. Caleb glanced stupidly about him and recognized the ante-room leading off from the sick chamber. Vaguely at first, then more clearly, he recalled that someone—ever and ever so long ago—had shaken him by the shoulder and had repeated over and over in his ears "She is alive!"

Then, at last the iterated words of command that had been saying themselves through his own mind for hours had somehow ceased, and something in his head had given way. He had lurched into the ante-room, tumbled over on a sofa and had fallen asleep at once from sheer exhaustion. And



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Mortimer Hubbell of Botsford, who had been suffering from a complication of diseases, died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Paul Morrow, Prindle and Morris have the funeral arrangements in charge.

Mrs. Edward Botsford passed a few days in Milford recently.

Elmer Fairchild of Chicago, who has been the guest of his uncle, George and Elmer Fairchild, returned to his home, yesterday.

Miss Maude Brown of Danbury was the guest Sunday and Monday of Mr. and Mrs. Asa Hawley of Hawleyville.

Mrs. J. L. Briggs of Newtown, is the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Jesse James of Hawleyville.

Mrs. W. W. Peck has been entertaining friends from Newark, N. J., for a few days.

Mr. and Mrs. Michael J. Murphy and daughter, Elizabeth, passed Monday in Bridgeport and Port Jefferson, L. I.

F. Briggs Barlow of New Haven, is the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Briggs.

Miss Mary Hope spent yesterday in Bridgeport.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Beardsley visited friends in Poughkeepsie, yesterday.

Daniel Honan of Bridgeport, is enjoying a week's visit with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Honan of Taunton.

Miss E. Madge Peck has been the guest of friends in the Park City.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Sutherland, of Botsford, moved their household goods to New Haven, this week.

Henry and Adolph Carlson are the happy owners of new violins, and are taking instructions on that instrument.

Mr. and Mrs. Ezra Douglase entertained last week, Mr. and Mrs. Leman

LIVE STOCK MARKET.

New York, July 7.—Medium to prime steers sold at \$5.50, @ \$6.75 per 100 lbs.; oxen at \$4 @ \$5.75; bulls at \$3 @ \$5; cows at \$2.25 @ \$3.50; dressed beef 8 1/2-10 1/2c; with a little fancy beef bringing 10 1/2-12c; Texas beef at 8 1/2-9 1/2c; chucks at 8 @ 9c; "hinds" and ribs at 10 @ 12 1/2c.

Common to choice veals sold at \$6.50 @ \$9.25 per 100 lbs., with \$9 the general top price; "throwouts" at \$5.50; buttermilk at \$4.75 @ \$5.25; yearlings at \$3.50 @ \$4. Dressed calves 9 1/2-10 1/2c for city dressed veals; 8 @ 11 1/2c for country dressed; 7 1/2 @ 8 1/2c for dressed buttermilk.

Common to prime sheep sold at \$3 @ \$5 per 100 lbs.; culls at \$2 @ \$2.75; common to choice lambs at \$7 @ \$9.25; culls at \$4.75 @ \$6.50. Dressed mutton 8 @ 9 1/2-12c; dressed lambs at 12 1/2 @ 15 1/2c, with general sales at 13 @ 15 1/2c.

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